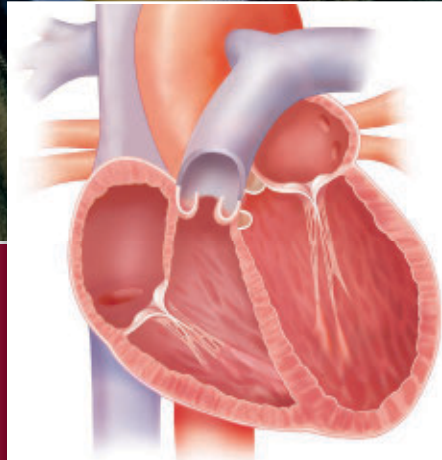


UNDERSTANDING CARDIOMYOPATHY



Living with Dilated or
Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy



What Is Cardiomyopathy?

If you have **cardiomyopathy**, you have a problem with the muscle tissue that makes up your heart. Cardiomyopathy can lead to a number of serious problems, but it can be managed. Read on to learn more about this condition and what you can do to help your heart.

Types of Cardiomyopathy

There are many different types of cardiomyopathy. The two main types are:

- **Dilated cardiomyopathy:** The heart muscle stretches (dilates), weakens, and becomes enlarged. This is the most common type. It mainly occurs in adults ages 20 to 60. It often has no known cause, and may be inherited (passed from one generation to the next). Known causes can include heart disease, high blood pressure, heavy alcohol use, and infection.
- **Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy:** The heart muscle thickens (hypertrophies) and grows stiffer than normal. This type is often found in young, active people. It is usually inherited.

How It Might Feel

Cardiomyopathy does not always produce symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they can range from mild to severe. You may have symptoms such as:

- Shortness of breath when you lie down or exert yourself.
- Unusual tiredness (fatigue) or weakness.
- Trouble doing normal amounts of exercise.
- Swelling in the abdomen, lower legs, feet, or ankles.
- A fast, pounding, or irregular heartbeat.
- Lightheadedness, dizzy spells, or fainting.
- Chest pain or pressure.





What You Can Do

Cardiomyopathy is generally a **chronic** condition. This means it won't go away. But you can work with your doctor to develop a plan to manage it. Depending on the severity of your condition, you may need certain treatments. These can include:

- Taking medications as prescribed.
- Making lifestyle changes, such as eating less salt, quitting smoking, and losing excess weight.
- Balancing activity and rest to help prevent symptoms.
- Tracking your weight to help monitor your heart health.
- Having certain procedures to help improve the heart's pumping.

Tests for Your Heart

Certain tests can give more information about your heart to help plan your treatment. These may include:

- **Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)** to show the speed and pattern of the heartbeat.
- **Echocardiogram** to show the size and shape of the heart and to check the health of the heart's chambers and valves. This test also shows whether or not the heart is pumping normally. The amount of blood pumped with each heartbeat is called the ejection fraction.
- **Cardiac catheterization** to check how well your heart muscle, valves, and blood vessels are working.

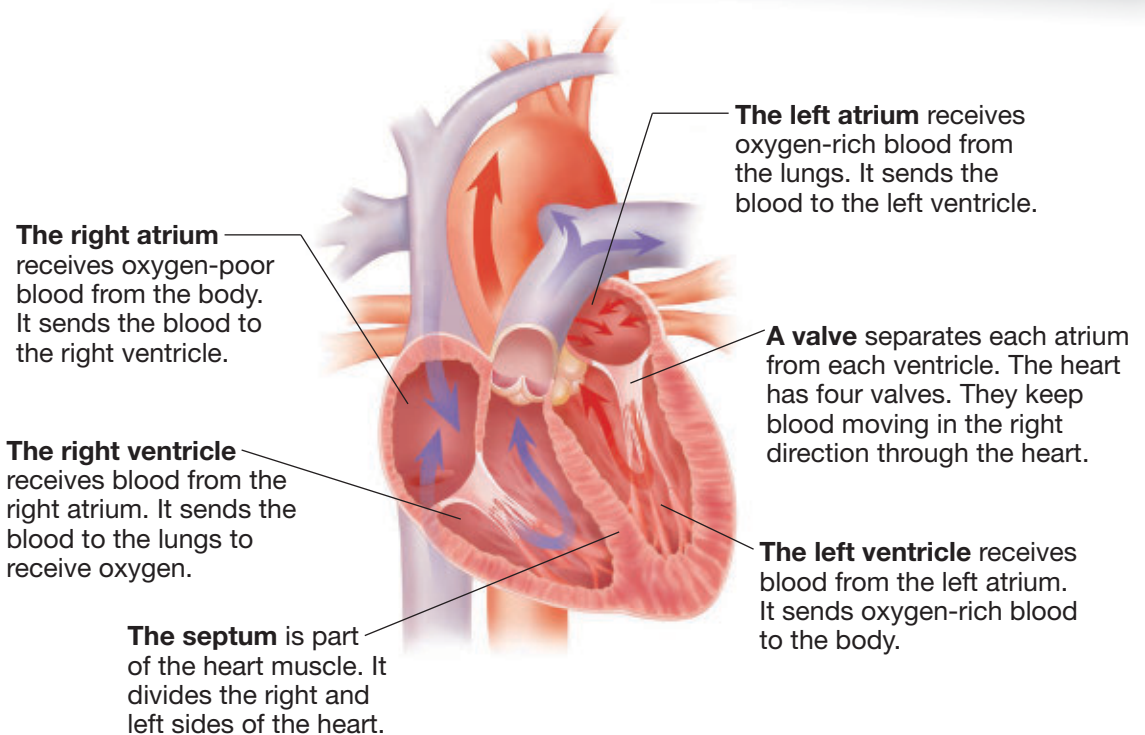


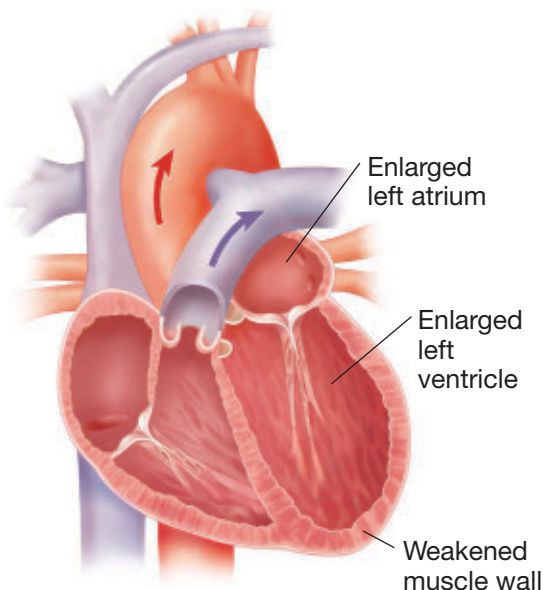
A Problem with the Heart Muscle

The heart is a muscle that pumps oxygen-rich blood to the whole body. Normally, the heart muscle is strong and flexible. With cardiomyopathy, the heart muscle becomes stretched, thickened, stiff, or enlarged. This makes it harder for the heart muscle to do its work.

The Heart As a Pump

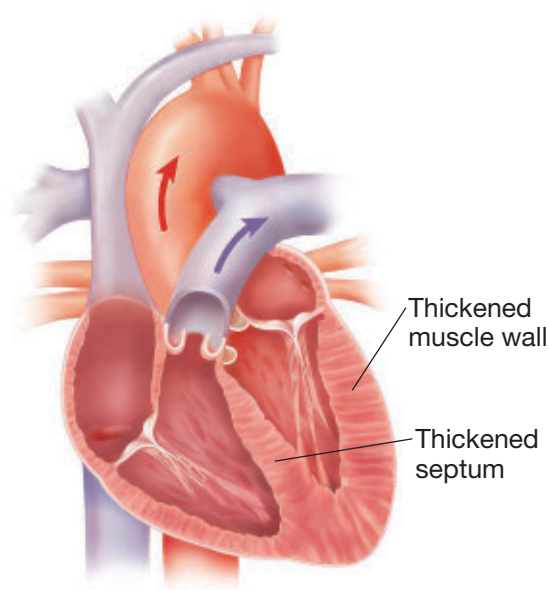
Four chambers hold the blood as it moves through the heart. The upper chambers are called **atria** and the lower chambers are called **ventricles**. Four valves act like one-way doors. They open and close to keep blood moving forward through the heart.





Dilated Cardiomyopathy

With this condition, the heart muscle has been damaged and can't move as much blood as before. The muscle stretches and thins out. The chambers, especially on the left side of the heart, often get larger to hold more blood. Larger chambers can move more blood for a while. But, in time, the stretched, thinned muscle gets tired out and the heart weakens.



Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

With this condition, the heart muscle thickens and stiffens, especially the walls of the left ventricle and septum. Thickened muscle walls may block blood flow and cause valve problems. Also, thick walls may make the chambers smaller, so they hold less blood. A stiff heart muscle can't relax between beats the way it should, so less blood moves with each beat.

Possible Effects of Cardiomyopathy

- **Heart failure** can occur when the heart muscle weakens so much it can no longer pump blood well. Fluid then builds up in the body, causing serious symptoms.
- **Damage to the heart's electrical system** can occur. This can cause abnormal heart rhythms (**arrhythmias**). In some cases, a dangerously fast arrhythmia can lead to sudden cardiac arrest (also called sudden death).
- **Heart valve problems** may develop as the heart muscle enlarges. Valves may not close properly, allowing blood to leak backward.
- **Blood clots** can form if blood isn't kept moving. Cardiomyopathy can allow blood to pool between each heartbeat and form clots. These can block blood flow in the heart or other parts of the body.

Living with Cardiomyopathy

Work with your doctor to form a treatment plan that meets your needs. Then follow this plan as directed. One goal of this plan is to take care of your heart muscle and prevent it from getting weaker. Another is to help you feel better and allow you to enjoy your life.

Take Steps to Help Your Heart

Below are some steps you can take to be healthier and help make your heart's work easier.



►► You can still be active even if you have cardiomyopathy. But don't push yourself too hard—rest when you feel tired.

- **Eat less salt (sodium).** Salt makes your body retain water. This leads to swelling and forces your heart to work harder. See page 8 to learn more.
- **Limit fluids, if instructed.** This may help keep the body from storing too much water. Talk with your doctor about how much fluid you should drink in a day.
- **Limit alcohol, if instructed.** Drinking too much alcohol can damage the heart muscle and worsen symptoms in some people with cardiomyopathy. Ask your doctor if you should limit or avoid alcohol completely.
- **Lose excess weight.** The more extra weight you have, the harder your heart has to work to pump blood through your body.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking damages your heart muscle and blood vessels. It can also make heart attack and stroke more likely.

Balance Activity and Rest

Having cardiomyopathy may mean you tire more quickly. But this shouldn't keep you from being active. In fact, being active may help you feel better. Talk with your doctor about how much activity is right for you. Ask what kind of exercise you can do safely. In general, moderate-intensity activities such as walking and biking are good choices. If you're at high risk for sudden cardiac arrest, you may be told to avoid certain sports and strenuous activities.

Keep Track of Your Weight

Rapid weight gain may mean that you are retaining fluid. This is one of the signs of heart failure (see page 5). Keeping track of your weight helps you detect this weight gain early and prevent further damage to your heart. Be sure to:

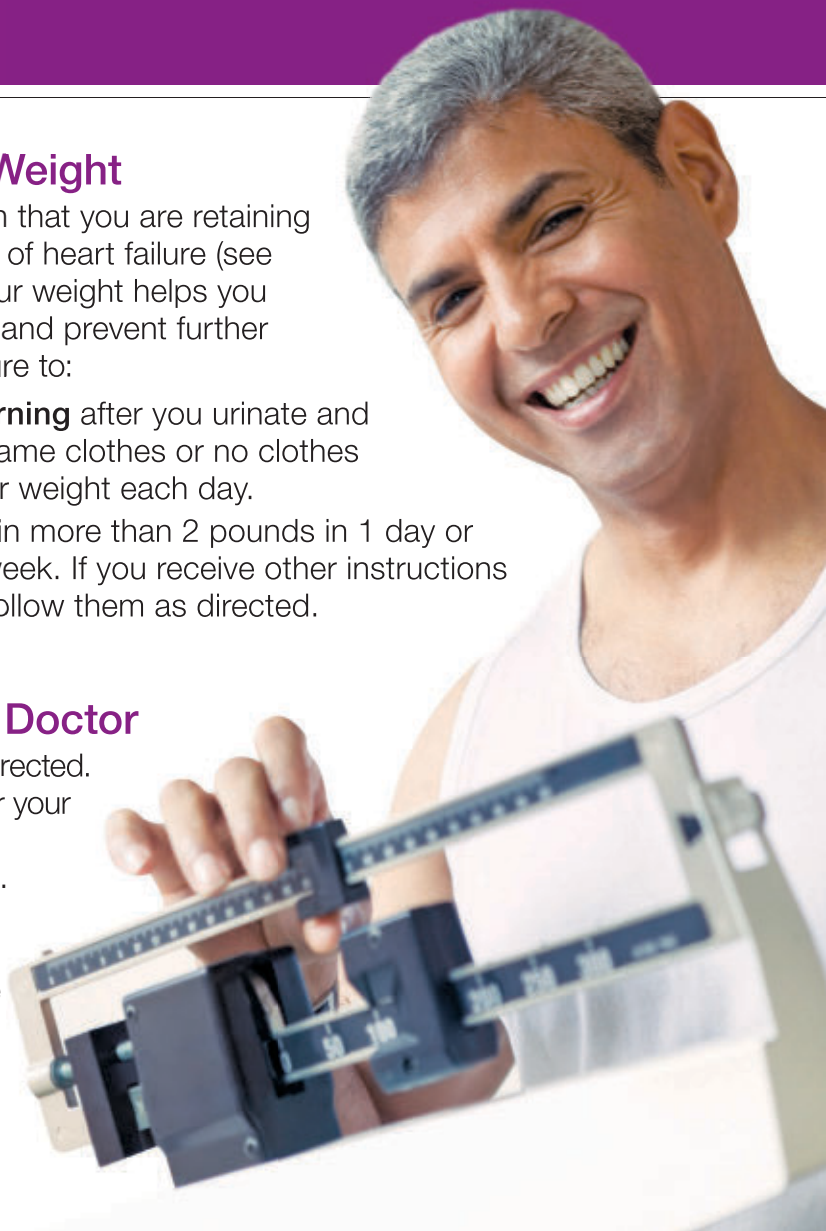
- **Weigh yourself every morning** after you urinate and before you eat. Wear the same clothes or no clothes each time. Write down your weight each day.
- **Call your doctor if** you gain more than 2 pounds in 1 day or more than 5 pounds in 1 week. If you receive other instructions for reporting weight gain, follow them as directed.

Follow Up with Your Doctor

See your doctor for visits as directed.

This helps your doctor monitor your condition and track how well your treatment plan is working.

During these visits, mention any problems you are having. If needed, your doctor may be able to make some changes that will help your plan work better for you.



When to Call the Doctor

With cardiomyopathy, it's important to monitor your condition and see your doctor for ongoing care. Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs or symptoms:

- Rapid weight gain (see “Keep Track of Your Weight” above)
- Increased swelling in the abdomen, lower legs, ankles, or feet
- Trouble breathing, especially at rest or lying down
- Chest pain or pressure
- Lightheadedness, fainting, or dizzy spells
- Fast, pounding, or irregular heartbeat
- Decreased urination
- Extreme tiredness



Reducing Sodium

Your doctor may advise you to eat less sodium (found in salt). Sodium makes the body retain fluid, which causes the heart to work harder. Reducing sodium may help prevent this. Try the tips below to get started.

How to Cut Back on Salt

- To help your heart, keep sodium to less than 1,500 mg (milligrams) a day.
- Look for low-salt recipes. They are healthy for your heart and can taste good, too.
- Don't add salt to food when you're cooking. Instead, season foods with high-flavor ingredients such as pepper, lemon, garlic, and onion.
- Take the saltshaker off the table. Before long, you'll learn to enjoy food without added salt.
- Ask that your food be cooked without added salt when eating out.
- Read labels before buying packaged foods. Check the serving size and the number of milligrams of sodium in each serving. Also, check the label for high-sodium ingredients. These include monosodium glutamate (MSG), brine, sodium chloride, and baking soda. Avoid foods with high-sodium ingredients near the top of the list.



Avoid these High-Sodium Foods

Refer to this list for some foods that are often high in sodium:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| • Canned fish | • Fast-food burgers | • Potato or tortilla chips |
| • Canned vegetables and soups | • French fries | • Pretzels, salted |
| • Cheese | • Lunchmeats | • Pudding, instant |
| • Crackers | • Mustard and ketchup | • Relish |
| • Cured meats (such as ham or bacon) | • Nuts, salted | • Sauerkraut |
| | • Pancakes from mix | • Smoked meats and fish |
| | • Pickled foods | • Tomato juice |

Medications May Help

Your doctor may prescribe medications for cardiomyopathy and any other underlying conditions you have. Certain medications improve the way the heart pumps. Others are taken to relieve symptoms. The most common medications for cardiomyopathy are described below.

Medications You May Take

- **ACE (angiotensin-converting enzyme) inhibitors or ARBs (angiotensin receptor blockers)** to help blood flow more easily by relaxing blood vessels and lowering blood pressure. This lets the heart pump more blood without doing more work.
- **ARNIs (angiotensin-receptor neprilysin inhibitors)** to help improve blood flow, reduce extra fluid, and lessen the work that the heart has to do. They help treat heart failure.
- **Aldosterone antagonists** to help rid the body of extra fluid. They may also be used to treat advanced heart failure.
- **Antiarrhythmics** to help slow and regulate a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Anticoagulants** to help prevent blood clots.
- **Beta-blockers** to lower blood pressure and slow the heart rate. This helps lessen the work the heart has to do.
- **Calcium channel blockers** to dilate blood vessels and slow the heart rate.
- **Digitalis** to slow the heart rate and help the heart pump more blood with each beat.
- **Diuretics** to help rid the body of extra fluid. This makes it easier for the heart to pump blood.



Taking Medications

For your health, taking your medications on time and as directed is essential. Your doctor will help you learn about the medications you take. If you don't understand something about your medication plan or have concerns, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Don't let confusion, cost, or fear keep you from better health.



Tips for Taking Your Medications

- Get a pillbox marked with the days of the week. Fill the pillbox at the start of each week. Then open each section to take your pills for that day.
- Take your medication at the same time or times each day. Make it a habit.
- Don't run out of medication. Order more medication when you still have a week supply of pills left.
- Have a list of the medications you take. Show the list to any doctor or healthcare provider you visit for treatment. Also, show it to the pharmacist before you buy over-the-counter or prescription medication.
- Never stop taking medication without talking to your doctor first. If you can't or won't take your medication for some reason, tell your doctor.

Medications Can Have Side Effects

Some of the medications you take may cause side effects. Side effects may include nausea, dry cough, dizziness, muscle cramps, or changes in your heartbeat. If you have any of these or other symptoms that bother you after starting a medication, tell your doctor right away. Your doctor may be able to adjust your dosage or give you a different medication.



Procedures May Help

In some cases of cardiomyopathy, certain procedures can help. These are not right for everyone. You and your doctor can discuss whether a procedure is a good option for you.

Procedures to Consider

Several procedures can help strengthen the heart or control problems that arise with cardiomyopathy. These include:

- **Cardioversion or catheter ablation.** These procedures help restore a normal heart rhythm. They may be used to treat certain types of fast or irregular heart rhythm problems.
- **Surgically implanted devices.** A small electronic device (such as a pacemaker or ICD) can be placed in the chest. This device helps control heart rhythm problems. It may also help a weakened heart pump blood more effectively.
- **Other procedures.** These can involve shrinking or removing thickened heart muscle to improve blood flow through the heart's chambers. If needed, procedures can also be done to repair or replace diseased or damaged heart valves.

In Severe Cases

For people who are very sick, the treatments below may be options. Your doctor can explain these treatments, if needed.

- **A left ventricular assist device (LVAD)** is a pump that is attached to the heart. It may be permanent or used only until a heart transplant can be done.
- **A heart transplant** is surgery to replace a diseased heart with a healthy donor heart.





Work with Your Doctor

If you have cardiomyopathy, work closely with your doctor to understand and manage your condition. Together, you can develop a plan to help your heart, so you can stay as active and healthy as possible.

Screening for Cardiomyopathy

Cardiomyopathy can run in families. This means your parents, brothers, sisters, and children could be at risk. For this reason, your doctor may suggest that all immediate family members be checked to see if they have the condition. Talk with your doctor to learn more about screening for cardiomyopathy.

Also available in Spanish

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